



THE ATHENS LAND TRUST NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2002

VOLUME 6. ISSUE 2

The Joys of Perpetuity

Quite often, people ask why ALT's mission includes such diverse activities as land conservation and affordable housing. The answer is both are uses of land that are important to a community's quality of life. During the past two years I believe that Athens has seen how true this is, given the loss of the Garden Springs mobile home park, the decrease in tree canopy and open space to development, and the gentrification of historic intown neighborhoods. Land trusts, both housing and conservation, see land as a community resource and offer ways to protect the designated uses of land permanently. Certain tracts are best left undeveloped—the benefits of open space for the health and well-being of citizens is well-documented. Undeveloped land cleans our air and our water and provides aesthetic beauty in our community. Access to natural areas is vital to many of us for physical, emotional, and spiritual reasons. Because of these benefits to the community as a whole, there are potential economic incentives and rewards for individuals who choose to restrict the development on their property through a conservation easement. Programs which offer Transfer or Purchase of Development Rights would further increase these benefits.



235 Rocksprings

Other tracts, whose locations provide access to public transportation and community services, are best utilized for housing. These tracts are also valued by developers who provide housing that is not affordable to most people. Like the 100 other community land trusts in the U.S., ALT can hold a tract of land so that it is always used for affordable housing. Ensuring that some land in a community is always available for affordable housing answers another question frequently asked of ALT—why do we retain the ownership of the land designated for housing? Land owned by ALT can never become rental property owned by absentee landlords and no longer affordable to the long-term residents of the neighborhood. ALT homeowners have full use of their land and also serve on the Board of Directors so they are able to make decisions that impact their land. They can pass on their land to their heirs or they can sell their house at any time. When they sell, ALT's limited equity clause ensures that the sale price is affordable to another family, thus assisting generations of low-to-moderate income citizens. The original homeowner has equity to take with him or her, and can purchase a house that has no equity restrictions. In short, ALT's one tract of land can provide affordable housing in perpetuity to unlimited generations of families.

For the individual, ALT's owning the land lowers the original cost of the house and provides stable housing costs. A person who has a rent payment of \$500 per month, with a 3% increase per year, will pay \$676, 781 during 50 years of renting, while a person who purchases a home with a \$500 monthly payment will pay \$237,090 and have the asset of the home to pass on to heirs. ALT is not attempting to serve individuals whose income and credit history allow them to compete for housing in the traditional market, where the average Athens-Clarke County house price is now approximately \$140,000. Instead, ALT is attempting to assist individuals who would otherwise not qualify for a mortgage and would be forced to remain renters.

During the recent political campaigns, much was said about the future of Athens-Clarke County and the preservation of the quality of life that we treasure, but see threatened. We at Athens Land Trust desire to be part of the solutions. We ask you to join us in a new land stewardship ethic, where land is valued as a community resource rather than as a commodity, and where each individual is actively involved in protecting the quality of life for all residents.

—Nancy Stangle

**ATHENS LAND TRUST
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Chris Aubry
Michael Bien
Brenda Crawford
Beth Gavrilles
Patricia Huff
Lisa Lott
Ray MacNair (V.P.)
Alan Morse
Nanette Nelson
Emily Patterson
Al Pless (Treasurer)
Dana Poole (Secretary)
Barbara Sims
Nancy Stangle (President)
Ed Vaughan
George Wright

OFFICE STAFF

LAND CONSERVATION
Laura Hall Gabriel
HOUSING OUTREACH
Alvina Gilham
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Lizzie Zucker Saltz
LEGAL COUNSEL
Skipper StipeMaas

telephone

706.613.0122

fax

706.613.0143

e-mail

athenslandtrust
@mindspring.com

website

www.athenslandtrust.org

195 Park Avenue
Athens, Georgia
30601-1749

~

**MONTHLY BOARD
MEETINGS ARE HELD ON
THE THIRD MONDAY OF THE
MONTH AT 7:00 PM AT THE
ATHENS LAND TRUST
OFFICES AND ARE
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.**

Affordable Housing News

Macon Tour

On October 3, the Athens-Clarke County Human and Economic Development Dept. sponsored a tour of Macon to visit some of the local affordable housing activities there. Approximately 40 government officials and housing agency staff members attended the tour. In Macon, the Athens groups visited several projects of housing development and neighborhood revitalization, carried out by a partnership of the Macon Housing Authority, local government agencies, non-profits organizations, and Mercer University.

A program about the Macon Tour was presented to local commissioners on November 18. ALT's Outreach Coordinator Alvina Gilham attended the Macon Tour. She said that the most important message from the Tour was "collaborate." "It appears that all of the local housing agencies have a similar mission, therefore I know that it is possible for us to work together for the good of the community and bring about more affordable housing." ALT is part of the Affordable Housing Roundtable, a collaboration of the local housing groups whose mission is to work together for increased affordable housing opportunities in Athens-Clarke County.

Athens Arms Relocation

Recently, the residents of the Athens Arms apartment complex were forced to relocate due to the sale of the property to a new owner. Many of the Athens Arms residents receive Section 8 vouchers to subsidize their rent payments. ALT Outreach Coordinator Alvina Gilham was contacted by several of the residents for assistance in finding and relocating to new apartments. Ms. Gilham met with the residents individually and in groups, helped research housing options, pulled in other housing agencies to help residents, served as a liaison between residents and government agencies, and helped over half the residents find new housing. While this situation has been largely resolved, housing groups are aware of the severe shortage of rental units available to persons with Section 8 vouchers and the increasing loss of low-income rental housing in our community.

Rocksprings Update

The rehabilitation work at 235 Rocksprings is almost complete! The contractor, Tel-Pro, has been restoring the house and hopes to have the work finished within the next few weeks. The work on 245 Rocksprings is underway, but completion will occur in early 2003. These houses were previously vacant and in need of repair. Please drive by and notice the improvement.

ALT's Housing Outreach Coordinator Alvina Gilham has been showing the Rocksprings houses to prospective buyers. 235 Rocksprings has one bedroom and 245 Rocksprings will be a two-bedroom house when completed. (See cover for a recent photo.)

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS:

ALT's most recent Board members are **Brenda Crawford, Barbara Sims, and Nanette Nelson.** **Ms. Crawford** and her three children are also the residents of ALT's first home at 640 W. Hancock Avenue. When asked by ALT's Outreach Coordinator Alvina Gilham how she was enjoying the house, Ms. Crawford said she and her children are "loving it." Ms. Crawford grew up in the neighborhood and she feels that living nearby is a good thing for her elderly mother. Ms. Crawford said that she is "glad to be a part of ALT," and she "is pleased to be the first homeowner." **Barbara Sims** is also a long-time resident of Athens. She lives in the Brooklyn area and works at WBKZ radio station. Ms. Sims recently said that she is "happy to be a part of this Board." "It's exciting to give people an opportunity to afford a home." **Nanette Nelson** is an Environmental Economist and Policy Analyst at the Office of Public Service and Outreach at the Institute of Ecology at UGA. Ms. Nelson also serves on the Oconee Farmland Protection Partnership. She wrote the article on page 4.

AND WELCOME NEW STAFF:

Lizzie Zucker Saltz is our new Administrative Assistant. She brings two decades of newsletter and office experience to the job. She is also Director of the nascent and nearby non-profit artspace, ATHICA: Athens Institute for Contemporary Art. She is happy to have found a position that is both flexible enough to allow her to care for her 20-month old daughter and that can do good for Athens. **Maureen O'Brien**, POH Development Coordinator, is also new under our roof. Please see page 5 for more about POH and her background.

Tour de Sprawl 2002: WHICH WAY DO WE GROW?

The third annual *Tour de Sprawl* rolled through Athens on Oct. 5. Approximately 200 participants cycled or rode chartered buses along the 16-mile route, with four stops along the way for refreshments and to listen to speakers. The theme of this year's Tour, organized by BikeAthens and co-sponsored by Athens Land Trust as well as numerous other local organizations and businesses, was "Which way do we grow?" According to Jason Henderson, chair of BikeAthens and chief organizer of the Tour, "taking a serious approach toward limiting sprawl is not anti-growth...Smarter growth with fair consideration of housing affordability and the diverse mobility needs and desires of Athenians...is sound economic policy for Athens, and providing quality affordable housing without forcing automobile dependency makes sound economic sense for working families." (Athens Banner Herald, Oct. 3, 2002)

The Tour's first stop was along the Oconee River Greenway, where Dr. Andrew Dannenberg, MD, MPH of the Emory School of Public Health discussed the negative impacts of sprawl on public health, in the form of increased rates of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and traffic-related deaths. Next, at the Olympic Drive fire station, Dr. Andy Keeler of the UGA School of Agricultural Economics talked about the impact of sprawl at the global level, and how by committing to curb sprawl local communities could have an impact on global climate change. Next the Tour stopped at the East Athens Fall Festival, where community development consultant Renita Ward spoke about common goals, including better transit and mobility for all residents. The Tour concluded at the Daily Groceries Co-Op 10th Anniversary celebration, where New Urbanist developer Charles Brewer of Atlanta spoke about the need for walkable, bikeable communities. Mayor-elect Heidi Davison also advocated for the kind of development that invites people to connect and communicate. "Conversations need to happen face to face, not bumper to bumper," she said (Athens Banner Herald, Oct. 6, 2002.) The third annual Tour de Sprawl was a good example of just that kind of conversation. —Beth Gavrilles

EASEMENT MONITORING

Conservation easements require annual monitoring to ensure that the properties are in compliance with the terms of the agreement signed by the land owner. The conservation committee has developed a checklist that allows the land trust to maintain consistent assessments from year to year. Teams from the land trust walk the properties and make note of any changes or misuse of the property. After filling out the basic checklist, the monitor has flexibility to add notes and more detail if desired.

Easement monitoring takes a few hours once a year and provides a great opportunity to get out on the properties and enjoy them for the intended purposes. If you are interested in taking a closer look at some of the properties, you are welcome to accompany a monitor on one of their outings. Please contact the land trust office for schedules. We are proud of our properties and will be happy to show you around. —Al Pless



Milford Hills Conservation Easement

As most of you know, the Milford Hills conservation easement has been the topic of many discussions and news articles lately. Unfortunately the residential development under construction adjacent to the easement has several significant issues which have impacted the conservation land: sedimentation of the creeks flowing through the easement land, impact to the historic barn on the easement and possible boundary impacts to the forested area along the sewer easement. ALT has been meeting with Athens-Clarke County officials, ACC Public Works Department, ACC Planning Department, Upper Oconee Watershed Network, natural resource people, and attorneys to assess the problems, determine an immediate solution for this site and long-term solutions to prevent this on other sites.

Discussions and partnerships will continue as ALT works out issues with this first conservation subdivision easement. One particularly important solution is to develop a County Erosion Control Ordinance that will be stronger than current state regulations and easier to enforce. The current erosion control regulations have loopholes and gray areas. ALT is also participating with a group developing an environmental agenda for the new commission, which will address better Zoning Ordinances, including a better Conservation Subdivision Ordinance and a good Tree Ordinance. (See *The Athens Banner Herald*, November 21, 2002 for more information) These issues all affect the quality of habitat preserved with conservation easements.

ALT's immediate plans are to develop specific selection criteria for accepting future conservation easements until the county passes better ordinances. We hope this will address many of the above issues. Thank you to everyone who spent time and energy working to protect this forestland.

—Laura Hall Gabriel



Athens Grow Green Coalition Update

When the Athens Grow Green Coalition formed back in September 2000, we expected to be in existence as an organization for three or four months. Our goal was to convince the ACC Commission to pass a Zoning Code that would implement the Guiding Principles of our Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The Plan was created with major citizen involvement, and included the designation of a rural greenbelt with very little development; and the promotion of infill and mixed-use development in the central areas of the county. While we were successful in persuading the Commission to increase our riparian buffers from the State-mandated minimum of 25 feet to 75 feet, we were not able to prevent the Commission from passing a Zoning Code that promotes sprawl by opening the greenbelt to suburban-style one-unit-per-acre development. We decided that rather than throw up our hands in despair, we should start advocating for changes to the Code.

Our first effort was to research Transferable Development Rights programs. TDRs allow a property owner in a “sending area” —e.g. an area designated for protection from development such as farmland or groundwater recharge areas— to sell the rights to develop his or her property for use in a “receiving area” —e.g. an area designated for more development than currently allowed such as an area with appropriate infrastructure and surrounding uses. We felt that a good TDR program could go a long way toward protecting land in the greenbelt, and the Mayor and Commission seemed to agree. Mayor Eldridge promised to appoint a committee to study the feasibility of TDRs for Athens. After more than a year of delay, however, the Mayor announced that he would not appoint a committee after all.

At this point, we realized that the public education efforts we had been pursuing were not going to be enough to effect the kind of change we believe is necessary if Athens is to truly turn away from sprawl. We decided that it was time to get organized! We incorporated as a Georgia Nonprofit

Corporation, and are currently pursuing 501(c)(4) status with the IRS.

We agreed that the most effective strategy would be to make sure that growth and development, protection of natural resources, and affordable housing were election issues in this year’s Mayor and Commission races. We felt it was critical to make sure voters knew where the candidates stood, so we created a set of Candidate Scorecards, based on responses to a Candidate Questionnaire as well as the voting and action record of the incumbents. We posted the Scorecards on our Web site and distributed them throughout downtown, Five Points, and the Prince Avenue corridor; and published them in *Flagpole*. We also co-sponsored several Candidate Forums with other local organizations, including the Athens Land Trust. The results appear promising: almost all of the candidates who received our highest ratings were elected by wide margins.

We are looking forward to working with the new Mayor and Commission to move Athens closer to the vision expressed in the Guiding Principles of the Land Use Plan.

For more information, visit our website at www.AthensGrowGreen.com.

—Beth Gavrilles

Farmland Protection in Oconee County

The Oconee County Partnership for Farmland Protection is a local group interested in protecting farmland for future generations. A recent study by the American Farmland Trust ranked Georgia third in the nation for farmland lost to development. The study found that between 1992 to 1997, Georgia paved over 184,000 acres of high quality farmland. The U.S. converted more than 6 million acres—an area approximately equal to the size of Maryland—during the same time period. The Partnership is actively courting the commissioners of Oconee County to begin a farmland protection program. Nineteen states and 34 counties have developed and successfully implemented such programs.

A farmland protection program offers farmers an alternative to selling their land for development. The program would offer to buy the development rights from the farmer, placing a conservation easement on their land that would limit its use to agricultural production. The Partnership has worked in the community for the past three years to educate landowners, farmers and elected officials about purchasing agricultural conservation easements or PACE programs. Next steps include securing funding to buy the development rights on a model farm and to conduct a mapping exercise to help with the prioritization of farmland protection. —Nanette Nelson

ALT Assists People of Hope Cooperative, Inc.

After eviction from Garden Springs Mobile Home Park The People of Hope Cooperative, Inc. (PoH) was formed as a nonprofit organization dedicated to owning and managing their own mobile home park. Late this summer a survey was taken of the former Garden Springs families, and thirty-nine families chose to continue as The People of Hope. The new five-member Board of Directors was elected in September.

Now they have a new office! Under the auspices of the Athens Land Trust, PoH received a grant from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development to set up an office for meetings, file storage, a work place for the staff and a training center for the members. Presently, the kitchen area of the ALT office has been transformed, providing a larger workspace for both groups. Maureen O'Brien, the Land Development Coordinator, has been funded part-time through this grant to continue a land/park search and assist the Board with development duties. Trained in landscape architecture, Maureen recently worked for six years with Robinson Fisher Associates in Athens, providing client and design support for many site development projects.

Board members have met with reporters throughout the state of Georgia and given talks at forums, festivals, and conferences in Athens and Atlanta. They will continue to work on getting the word out that resident-owned mobile home parks are a viable solution for affordable housing, and that housing sites that are accessible to shopping, bus lines and other services are important for low income citizens. Please support the upcoming PoH fundraising activities.

The Board of Directors of the People of Hope Cooperative, Inc. thanks the Board, staff and members of ALT for their support as they work together for the goal of affordable housing in Athens-Clarke County. To contact People of Hope write them at P. O. Box 1911, Athens, GA 30603, or call and leave a message at 546-5051.

'People of Hope' Needs an Outreach Coordinator!

People of Hope Cooperative, Inc., working to become Georgia's first cooperatively owned mobile home park is hiring a part-time Outreach Coordinator. The person would be responsible for daily office operations, fundraising and coordinating communication between the Board of Directors, the public, and the nonprofit organization's membership. Requires oral and written fluency in English and Spanish with computer and financial management skills. \$15.00/hr, part-time, evening and weekend meetings, beginning Jan. 2003.

- For further information Call 546-5051.

- Send resume to People of Hope, 195 Park Avenue Athens, 30601.

ALT EXTENDS THANKS TO

Our Computer Assistance Angels:

Beth Gavrilles • Phillip Juras • Dana Poole

~

The Newland Foundation

~

Kenney Ridge Community Association

for their help with

'An Afternoon Under the Oaks'

on May 11, 2002

From TRUST to the GA Community Loan Fund

In the Fall of 2001 ALT newsletter, we announced that the money raised by TRUST "True Relief with US Taxes" had been dedicated to the development of a new not-for-profit, the Georgia Community Loan Fund (formerly the People's Fund of Georgia). One year later, we are well on our way to the creation of a revolving fund that will provide low-interest loans and technical support to people and communities in the State of Georgia that have been underserved by traditional lending institutions.

The Georgia Community Loan Fund (GCLF) has recently received 501(c)(3) approval from the IRS designating nonprofit status, and has formed an initial board composed of myself, Beth Gavrilles from the Institute of Ecology, and Toni Hackett Antrum from UGA Small Business Development. Georgia Legal Services Program is providing legal services through Skipper StipeMaas, attorneys from Sutherland, Asbill and Brennan, and social work interns and legal interns from UGA. We are fortunate to have their support in making our idea a reality (it's a lot of work!).

After an informative weekend at the National Community Capital Association's annual conference in Oakland, we are gearing up for our first strategic planning session. Meanwhile, funders from within the state and around the country have been contacting us - there is a huge need for this type of fund in Georgia, and community loan funds are an emerging strategy for affordable housing in many states. We foresee that they'll be even more critical in the coming years.

For more information, contact Beth Gavrilles: beth@wuplet.com, (706) 227-0422.

-Paul Hirsch

